

## IDAHO STATESMAN

**Monday**

### **More math and science may limit student electives; Ed Board plans Boise public hearing on high school redesign**

Bill Roberts

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A state proposal to toughen Idaho high school graduation requirements could force kids to surrender electives and make districts restructure the school day to fit in everything.

The State Board of Education's proposal to add a year of science and two years of math to high school could make some kids choose between taking classes such as band, foreign languages and art from a dwindling number of elective credits, Boise and Meridian educators say.

"I think it is really bleak for all of the electives," said Ted Totorica, Borah High School choir director.

Ed Board members say the additional math and science classes are important to produce more students who are better prepared to succeed in college or the workplace. Those rules could require students to more carefully target their elective choices, said Sue Thilo, an Ed Board member who chaired the committee that drafted the high school redesign plan. "I still am not convinced students will have far less choice than they have today."

Today's high school students are of two minds on the idea of losing electives. Some students think the board's plan gives high school more focus. Others say electives are a way to break up the academic day. But electives are more than fun classes. Many, such as foreign language, are precursors to college.

No matter what students think, if the Ed Board and the Legislature sign off on the high school redesign plan, it could affect nearly every high school student beginning with the class of 2012 - this year's sixth graders. They would be the first to graduate under the new plan and nearly all of them would take high school electives.

A public hearing on the Ed Board's proposed high school redesign is set for Oct. 12 in Boise.

Idaho is one of about 35 states from Arkansas to Ohio that are working to make high school more rigorous and more relevant to students. Many are doing it for the same reason as Idaho: create a more rigorous high school curriculum in the hope that it will propel more students into college or other post-secondary education.

Idaho lags behind much of the country in the number of students who attend college. And many students who do go need remediation in basic skills once they get there.

An early estimate on the cost of high school redesign is about \$16 million, most of it to hire new math and science teachers for required classes. The Ed Board, however, is doing its own cost estimate. Boise School District estimates the reforms would cost it \$1.2 million.

If the number of electives dwindles, students may go to night school or summer school to get subjects out of the way and make room for the courses they want to take, predicted Dean Jones, Boise district school administrator and a member of the committee that drafted the high school plan.

A number of students already do that.

Kelly Borchers, 17, a Timberline senior, has attended summer school and the state's online high school to get required classes out of the way. That helps her take classes such as choir - sometimes two classes in choir.

"I'm really (glad) I get to take choir," she said.

Adjoa Anim-Appiah, 16, a Timberline High senior, doesn't think the loss of electives would hurt her education. She uses electives to narrow in on what she wants to do later in life. "I think it is a good idea. It gives you focus," she said.

Ed Board member Thilo says focusing electives makes sense in her vision for a more rigorous, redesigned high school.

She is troubled, for example, by choir directors who want their kids enrolled in premiere choirs to also be enrolled in a second choir elective. Or by high school athletes who use elective credits for a sports fitness class at the urging of coaches.

It is an "unwritten requirement" among many coaches that their kids should be in those classes that improve fitness by lifting weights and other exercises, Jones said.

"We want them to take algebra 2 instead of weightlifting," Thilo said in a recent interview with the Idaho Statesman "They can do weightlifting later."

Mitch and Jake Burroughs, varsity players on the Meridian High School football team, don't see it that way.

Mitch, a running back, and Jake, a quarterback, would give up other electives before the fitness class because they believe it gives them an edge in games.

"I feel like sports is in my future," Mitch said.

Not all students or schools would feel an elective crunch equally if the board's proposal becomes law.

In Boise schools, for example, students in ninth through 12th grade can take up to 48 credits during their high school career - a mixture of required subjects like English and math, and electives - in a typical six-period day. In Meridian district, two high schools - Mountain View and Meridian - are on block schedules that can earn students up to 64 credits in four years in eight subjects a semester stretched over two days. The loss of a few electives won't be as painful, said Linda Clark, district superintendent.

Clark's considering putting the same structure in the district's other two high schools, Centennial and Eagle.

"I believe we have to make high school more rigorous," she said. "We must also look at models that don't impact electives. I don't want it to be (an) either-or."

In Boise, the fewer number of credits creates a bottle neck when proposed state requirements collide with electives in a student's junior year.

A junior could go from having seven electives now to just three if the state adds more science and math, said Dean Jones, district instruction administrator and a member of the committee that drafted the high school plan.

But students need at least four elective credits to take one class at the Dehryl A. Dennis Professional-Technical Education Center because the classes are typically offered for a year in two hour blocks.

"You don't have it," Jones said. "We're holding those kids back."

The Ed Board's proposal isn't final. A round of statewide public hearings in October will be the first field test of a plan that appears to have strong support from the Ed Board. Several members served on the committee drafting the plan.

But Thilo said it is also a time to look for flaws that can be fixed before going to the Legislature.

"I want to hear the feedback from the districts," she said. "Maybe (we) need to do some tweaking and the districts need to do some tweaking."

Narrowing elective choices wouldn't hurt a student's public education. "I think it is a good idea. It gives you focus."

Adjoa Anim-Appiah, 16, Timberline High School senior

"I would drop other classes for fitness. I feel like sports is in my future"

Mitch Burroughs, 16, Meridian High School junior

### Additional Information

On Oct. 12, you'll get to have your say on a plan to create more rigorous Idaho high schools. And by January, the Idaho Legislature could decide on the plan.

The State Board of Education came up with a tougher high school curriculum for several reasons:

- Lots of Idaho kids don't go to college. Idaho ranks 46th in the number of college graduates per capita, and more than 40 percent of freshmen showing up at Idaho colleges still need remediation.
- Idaho students don't compete as well as they could with students nationally and internationally.
- Students often disconnect with school during their senior year because of a lack of challenging classes to keep them engaged.

How graduation requirements would change

High school students would take more math and science and complete a year-long project in their senior years as part of a plan to beef up graduation requirements.

- Math: Increase required math credits from four to eight, meaning students would take math every year. Math classes would include algebra 1, geometry and in many cases, algebra 2. Currently, the state does not set specific classes to fulfill its math requirements, although some districts, such as Boise and Meridian, require algebra 1.

Æ Science: Raise the number of required credits from four to six and require all classes to have labs. Classes would focus on physical science, life sciences and Earth sciences.

- Senior project: A project in which students would make an oral presentation, do a project and provide a written report.
- Career focus: Target about half of a student's electives into specific career or interest areas, such as technology or health education.
- College entrance exams: Require high school students to take the ACT, SAT or Compass by the end of 11th grade.

For middle school

- "C" average: Require a cumulative C average in classes such as math, science, language arts and social studies in sixth through eighth grades before going onto high school.
- Pre-algebra: Complete pre-algebra before entering ninth grade.

Have your say

If you have comments about the Idaho State Board of Education's proposed high school redesign, you can attend public hearings, or write or e-mail to the Ed Board.

Hearings

The State Board of Education will hold public hearings around the state in October on its proposed high school redesign. All hearings begin at 6:30 p.m.

- Idaho Falls: Oct. 5, Eastern Idaho Technical College, 1600 South 25th East, Creek Building, Room 558.
- Pocatello: Oct. 6, Idaho State University, Little Wood River Room, 1065 S. Cesar Chavez Pond Student Union
- Boise: Oct. 12, Jordan Ball Room, Boise State University Student Union Building, 1910 University Drive.
- Twin Falls: Oct. 13, College of Southern Idaho, 315 Falls Ave., Taylor Building, Room 277.
- Lewiston: Oct. 18, Lewis-Clark State College, Williams Conference Center, 500 8th Ave.
- Coeur d'Alene: Oct. 19, North Idaho College, Driftwood Bay Room, Edminster Student Union, 1000 W. Garden Ave.

Written comments

Address them to:

State Board of Education, P.O. Box 83720, Boise, ID, 83720-0037, Attn. High School Rule Changes. Written comments must be received by Oct. 26.

E-mail

Comments to the Ed Board at [board@osbe.idaho.gov](mailto:board@osbe.idaho.gov).

Physical education hearing

A hearing to increase physical education requirements in Idaho schools - which could affect middle schools and high schools - is scheduled for 7 p.m. Sept. 15 at the airport Holiday Inn in Boise.